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South Asia

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A chilling inheritance of terror

By Syed Saleem Shahzad

KARACHI - Ever since the frenzied shootout last month on September 11 in Karachi there have been doubts over whether Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the self-proclaimed head of al-Qaeda's military committee, died in the police raid on his apartment.

Certainly, another senior al-Qaeda figure, Ramzi Binalshibh, widely attributed as being the coordinator of the September 11 attacks on the United States a year earlier, was taken alive and handed over to the US. The latest information is that he is on a US warship somewhere in the Gulf.

Now it has emerged that Kuwaiti national Khalid Shaikh Mohammed did indeed perish in the raid, but his wife and child were taken from the apartment and handed over to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), in whose hands they remain.

Sources close to Pakistani intelligence agents say that the wife, under intense interrogation, has revealed information that is likely to lead to a new crackdown in Pakistan, as well as in Southeast Asia.

After the Taliban and al-Qaeda were routed in Afghanistan at the end of 2001, many fled to Pakistan to regroup and set up new cells. One of these, as described in Asia Times Online, [From the al-Qaeda puzzle, a picture emerges](#), was in Karachi, with Khalid Shaikh Mohammed as its head.

Despite being tracked by informers within Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, who has been described as "probably the only man who knows all the [al-Qaeda] pieces of the puzzle", always managed to remain one step ahead of any raiding parties in the slum areas along the coastal belt of Karachi.

However, it was then learned that Shaikh Mohammed had established connections with some local groups, including underworld figures, to entrench his cell. Using highly sensitive equipment, in April a call was tracked to someone by the name of Arif, living in the densely populated southwestern part of the city. Arif spoke to a Tunisian, passing on a message from Shaikh Mohammed. Subsequently, the Tunisian is believed to be the man who rammed a truck laden with explosives into a Jewish synagogue in Djerba in Tunisia in which many French and German citizens died.

After this suicide attack, the FBI were onto Shaikh Mohammed in a

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big way, and, no doubt not entirely without coincidence, on September 11 they decided on a showdown at the apartment of Shaikh Mohammed, his wife and child, in the Defense Housing Authority near Korangi Road. A number of Arabs were also living in the apartment at the time.

Initially, the joint ISI-FBI plan was to take Shaikh Mohammed alive so that he could be grilled, especially as he was believed to have knowledge of other al-Qaeda cells in Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen and elsewhere. However, as a plainclothed officer climbed the stairs toward the third-floor apartment, a hand grenade was thrown, and he retreated. Reinforcements then arrived, and for the next few hours a fierce gun battle blazed.

The FBI, still keen to take Shaikh Mohammed alive, teargassed the area, and a number of people were captured. However, despite instructions to the contrary, a few Pakistan Rangers entered the flat, where they found Shaikh Mohammed and another man, allegedly with their hands up. The Rangers nevertheless opened fire on the pair.

Later, the Pakistani press carried pictures of a message scrawled in blood on the wall of the flat, proclaiming the Muslim refrain of *Kalma*, in Arabic: "There is no God except Allah, Mohammed is his messenger"). An official who was present in the flat at the time of the shooting has told Asia Times Online that the message was written by Shaikh Mohammed with his own blood as his life drained from him.

Subsequently, to their surprise, the raiders learned that Ramzi Binalshibh had been netted in the swoop. And nothing further was said of Khalid Shaikh Mohammed.

But now it emerges that an Arab woman and a child were taken to an ISI safe house, where they identified the Shaikh Mohammed's body as their husband and father. The body was kept in a private NGO mortuary for 20 days before being buried, under the surveillance of the FBI, in a graveyard in the central district of Karachi.

The widow subsequently underwent exhaustive interrogation in the custody of FBI officials, during which she revealed details of people who visited her husband, and of his other contacts and plans. News of the death of Khalid Shaikh Mohammed was intentionally suppressed so that officials could play on the power of his name to follow up leads and contacts.

From this it emerges that, in particular, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed was in close contact with the Rabitatul Mujahideen, an alliance formed by Indonesia's Jemaah Islamiyah to act as a central committee for leaders of the various militant groups in Southeast Asia. He was also in touch with dissident groups within the Lashkar-i-Taiba, a Pakistani-based militant group that has been active in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in Indian-administered Kashmir, and another Pakistani militia, the Ansarul Islam.

Intelligence officials now believe that through these links a new wave of terror will be unleashed - and officials have already taken the precaution to warn the intelligence agencies of friendly countries to check the lists of all people who have undergone flight training in the past six months: They have been led to believe that another World Trade Center/Pentagon attack is being planned, although not on a target in the US.

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